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COLLEGE BREAKS GROUND ON BATTELL PARK

MADELEINE KAPTEIN/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Construction on Battell Park began early in September, and will continue through the fall semester, with plans to complete the installation by the end of the term.

By ELLA CALLAHAN
Contributing Writer

The college recently broke ground on Battell Park, a new outdoor space designed to add more communal areas to campus.

Construction of the park will be carried out in three phases, the first being the addition of a sidewalk spanning from the edge of New Battell into Battell beach, followed by the installations of a swing set, fixed hammocks and three five-foot sun couches. The equipment, which will be purchased from the manufacturer Kompan, will be built from wood framed installations chosen to complement the surrounding nature.

The equipment is set to arrive on Nov. 6, and the project's estimated time of completion is the end of this semester.

Last year, Barbara McCall, associate vice president for student health and well-being, reached out to various student groups to ask about the places that they saw as important for community mental health.

"They named spaces like the Adirondack chairs, the swings at Twilight, and the picnic tables outside of Proctor," McCall said. With this feedback, the concept of Battell Park, an outdoor space catered to the needs of the student body, was formed.

Head Horticulturalist and Visiting Lecturer Tim Parsons was approached last fall by the Director of Facilities to help guide this project, which has ultimately become student-led.

"My goal as a landscaper has always been to make the outside part of your experience here," Parsons said. "I think this school has a great reputation for outdoor experiences elsewhere ...we have beautiful grounds with no place to sit outside and enjoy the weather," he added.

Parsons took the project as an opportunity to involve his students, allowing his landscape design class to decide the most optimal locations for this park. Parsons noted that the swings at Twilight were in constant use; the class decided that placing the park on Battell Beach would allow students to enjoy activities

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CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF THE CHATEAU

COURTESY PHOTO/ SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The Chateau was the first co-ed dorm on campus, housing both men and women starting in 1972.

By NOOR KHAN
Layout Editor

The Chateau marked its 100th birthday on Saturday, welcoming French Department alumni, students and professors for a celebration of its legacy. The dorm was the first of its kind in the U.S., a maison française or "french house" conceived and built with the purpose of speaking only French inside in mind. With its iconic dormers and peaked towers, the building has long stood out among the campus's predominantly gray-stone Georgian architecture.

"This birthday [of the Chateau] is also the birthday of where immersive learning started [in the United States] as the first French house," Associate Professor of French and Francophone Studies Julien Weber said.

The festivities were a mix of Chateau history lessons and group reminiscings, culminating in a panel by four college professors and a reception in the building's Grand Salon. The crowd of around 40 people shared memories of their time in the French Department, and alumni were able to poke around in the classrooms where they once lived, ate and learned.

For many alumni that graduated before 1980, their favorite part of their Chateau experience no longer exists: the former dining hall in the basement, which is now a performance space. It was host to the original language tables for every language department and

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Settlement of free speech lawsuit by FLORA eases state cannabis advertisement regulations

MADELEINE KAPTEIN/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The front of FLŌRA, the cannabis store in Middlebury that sued the CCB last December.

By MADELEINE KAPTEIN
Editor in Chief

Last week, the Vermont Cannabis Control Board (CCB) and Middlebury's FLŌRA Cannabis agreed on a settlement of the lawsuit filed last December by Dave Silberman, owner of FLŌRA. The lawsuit alleged that the CCB violated free speech rights by restricting cannabis advertisements. The settlement does not change the state's regulatory power over cannabis ads, but grants some leeway to retailers in the pre-approval process.

Previously, cannabis retailers had to submit all advertisements to the CCB and wait for approval to publicize them; Silberman said responses to his submissions have often been slow or sometimes nonexistent. Now, if the CCB does not grant approval or denial within five

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UNDERSTAFFING CONTINUES TO STRAIN CATERING, DINING, STUDENT ACTIVITIES OFFICE

By MAYA ALEXANDER
Editor at Large

Since Covid-19 pandemic restrictions ended, staffing has generally improved on campus. However, several departments still face the burden of being undersupported, especially in light of the budget cuts announced in April. The cuts reduced staff and faculty retirement benefits and offered some staff a financial incentive to retire early.

Catering has had four people to carry out the work normally allocated to 12, Ross Dining Hall had to eliminate a full-time position due to budget constraints, and the Student Activities Office (SAO) has had a vacancy in their Program and Budget Administrator role since July, a job that is vital for balancing the office's workloads.

Understaffing has not worsened since the budget cuts were announced, several staff members said, though drawing people to positions at Middlebury and maintaining high morale is a constant challenge. The shortage has caused burnout for workers, and departments have had no choice but to alter what they can provide.

Catering Coordinator and Events Supervisor Jess Crossman said that her team wants to put out a good product, but cannot do that without more hands. The catering team has lost 14 full-time employees in the past eight years.

"We like to be proud of what we do and being short-staffed affects that greatly," she said. "It causes burnout after time. We're tired. There's not a huge work-life balance when you're trying to execute so many events at the same level, and I think a common misconception is that, well, it's only for 10 people. It takes the same amount of effort, manpower, everything to execute a 10-person event as it takes to execute a 500-person event."

Crossman also explained that the issue is not always due to understaffing alone, but because of increased demand for catering services without the proper staff to match.

"Because of the staffing and the demand of catering, we had to pump the brakes and slow down. We understand that we are such a huge convenience for people and we want to be able to say yes to that. I can't express enough that we don't want to say no, but we also have to maintain the level of quality that we're putting out and ourselves and to have a work-life balance," she said.

Ross Dining Services Manager Brent Simons expressed a similar sentiment.

"If an employee is out or a position is vacant responsibilities are then redistributed throughout the operation(s). This has a tremendous impact on employee morale as well as increasing stress throughout the department. If staffing is an issue on a particular day we may need to close a food station in the dining room or alter the menu," he wrote in an email to The Campus.

Understaffing ultimately affects students and the services they can receive. However, Valerie Nettleton, executive

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Faculty debate the future of U.S. democracy

By SAM MERRIAM
Contributing Writer

On Sept. 24, the Political Science Department hosted a roundtable discussion titled "Is the U.S. Still a Democracy?". Professor of Political Science Erik Bleich moderated as Associate Professors of Political Science Sebnem Gumuscu and Ajay Verghese and Professor of Political Science Murray Dry provided their perspectives.

Bleich opened to a full room of students, faculty and community members: "What used to be unthinkable is now thinkable: that the U.S. is either no longer a democracy or will soon be no longer classified as a democracy by experts in this country and around the world. These are troubling times."

He ended his introduction with a brief explanation of various forms of government and three stages of the move from democracy to autocracy: democratic recession, democratic breakdown and autocratic consolidation.

From there, Gumuscu and Verghese — both of whom specialize in comparative politics — defined democratic backsliding and gave historical parallels. Gumuscu likened the concept of democracy to a soccer game, with a level playing field, impartial referees, and evenly-matched teams. Democratic backsliding, she said, is akin to "tilting that playing field so that one of the teams has a higher chance of winning the game. And they keep winning that game because the playing field is no longer level."

How does this happen? In the soccer analogy, it is 'capturing the referees' — in government, this includes civil servants, the Department of Justice and the judiciary.

"We're seeing all the attempts on the part of the administration to replace some of these very important figures... they're all very much deeply politicized as we speak," Gumuscu said.

Verghese used his time to discuss the history of democratic backsliding and autocratic consolidation in former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's India in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Initially thought by her own party to be "easily controlled," she "gained control of the judiciary and politicized the civil service," Verghese explained. After losing her role and being convicted of minor election crimes, Gandhi retook power a few years later with immediate retribution towards her opponents, limited media freedoms, and implemented a program that forcibly sterilized millions.

After suggesting parallels between Gandhi and President Trump, Verghese moved on to the resolution of the Indian case and what can be learned from that example. He articulated three points of action and focus, all based on his comparative analysis: voting, coalition building and selecting young, charismatic leaders. Verghese lastly emphasized the role of nonviolent protest, explaining how peaceful demonstration improves public opinion in opposition to an autocrat.

Dry focused more strictly on domestic politics: "I start not so much from the question 'is America still a democracy?' so much as 'do we still have our Constitution?'"

He first made clear that we must recognize how a large portion of the country "supports, if not everything Donald Trump does, most of what he does," then said that Trump's actions have betrayed the conventions of American democracy, placing the onus on the Supreme Court for granting the president too much control over both domestic and foreign affairs.

After their statements, the panelists faced a handful of student questions, ranging from the appetite for political violence among young people to a post-Trump future of the MAGA movement.

Alpana Bakshi '26 asked the session's first question: "Has the authority overreached enough to mobilize the pushback?"

In response, the panelists put forth their ideas of what that pushback could look like. Dry put emphasis on the power of voting, attending town halls and speaking to representatives. Verghese restated the efficacy of "nonviolent disobedience," including general strikes and economic boycotts.

In the crowded lecture hall, majors and non-majors alike, crammed side by side. Some students, like Gabe Palmer '26, heard from professors in front of whom they sit in class every day. As a Political Science and Anthropology double major, Palmer was motivated to attend by the particular selection of panelists.

"Within the political science department, the question of 'is America still a democracy?' is discussed more by comparative professors. But given that Professor Dry was speaking, it seemed that the Americanist professors were more openly grappling with that question," Palmer said.

Even for those less familiar with the department, the weight of the topic was clear. Hannah Gilmer '26 said that she was motivated to attend the talk to "help situate what we see in the news in a broader context." Like Palmer and Bakshi, she left the room with an appreciation of the variation in each panelist's focus.

On the titular question, the panelists were mixed. While Gumuscu was unsure exactly how to classify the U.S., she said that "we passed the threshold, for sure. This is not a liberal democracy. This is not perhaps even an electoral democracy."

She expressed disappointment in non-governmental actors who are "not doing a good job" in the face of backsliding.

"That's very concerning to me because there is no united force yet that is mobilized against these attacks against American democracy," she said.

Verghese first agreed with Gumuscu: "I would also say deeply concerned." He warned against predicting the political future, but again used the Indian case as an example, where Gandhi's overreach led to a "self-correcting" response, with people pushing back to federal overstepping.

Dry was hesitant to classify the U.S. as anything other than a constitutional democracy — at least so far. In his closing remarks, he clarified that "I think that this individual, in the office he holds, given its power, is a threat to the constitutional rule of law."

Editor's Note: Senior News Editor Cole Chaudhari '26 contributed reporting to this article.

COLE CHAUDHARI / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS
Left to right: Political Science faculty Erik Bleich, Sebnem Gumuscu, Ajay Verghese, and Murray Dry gathered as a panel to speak on the topic of American democracy last Wednesday.

Waste Management encourages students to sort in light of staff shortages

By KAI ARROWOOD
Contributing Writer

The design and construction of New Battell came with yet another upgrade this fall: a composting system. Bins designated for food waste were placed in lounge kitchens and garbage rooms, giving New Battell residents the opportunity to dispose of their scraps sustainably. Facilities hope to use the new composting options as a test to gauge students' engagement with the system.

Some dorms have composting options available, but it is up to the student to request a personal bin, according to Facilities Team Liaison for Waste Management Doug Smith. Compost tends to be the most pungent form of waste, and the hassle of emptying and cleaning odorous bins turns off students from requesting them, even if they know they are available. Due to the fluctuating willingness of students to compost, dorm food waste accounts for only a small fraction of Middlebury's compost.

The majority of Middlebury's compost, which made up 27% of the college's total waste in 2024 according to the Middlebury College Waste and Recycling Report, comes from the dining halls. Students are instructed to leave any leftover food on their plates, which is then scraped into composting bins by dining hall staff.

Food waste is collected weekly and transported to Middlebury's on-site composting facility, located behind the golf course. There, the compost is mixed with manure and woodchips and left to sit for nearly a year, periodically turned by waste management staff. At the end of the process, what were once uneaten lunches become rich topsoil prime for use on Middlebury's fields or at the Knoll.

Middlebury's facilities staff, in true Vermont fashion, take sustainability seriously. The Waste and Recycling Report also showed that in nearly every month of 2024, recycled and composted waste outnumbered waste sent to landfills by tens of thousands of pounds. Recycling is sent to Middlebury's Material Recovery Facility (MRF) where staff determine which bags to send to Addison County Waste Management. In order to be approved for delivery, bags of recycling must have less than one percent of visible contamination. If too many contaminated bags are transported, Middlebury is fined.

COLE CHAUDHARI/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS
The composting option in New Battell, which is present in all of the kitchens and elsewhere in the dorm.

The MRF previously handled their own sorting, combing through bags and picking out unrecyclable materials. During the time of Covid-19 restrictions, this practice was halted to protect staff from potentially infectious waste and has not been reimplemented since. Instead, the MRF follows a "zero-sort" policy, which, although less labor-intensive, decreases the amount of material that ends up recycled.

Staff shortages are largely responsible for the implementation of zero-sort. Middlebury once employed up to 30 students to help sort through waste, a tedious process that took up the better part of a week. The facilities team now copes with a lack of helping hands by checking each bag for visible contamination, a quicker, if less accurate, way to handle Middlebury's waste.

Supervisor of Custodial and Support Services and former Waste Management Director Kimberly Bickham said that she does not foresee the revival of on-site sorting.

"I love everything recycling stands for," she said. "But sorting is very labor-intensive."

Nikolas Homan '29 lamented the lack of composting options in Old Battell. "I'd compost if I could, but I don't know how to access it," he said in an interview with The Campus.

With the termination of MRF sorting, the burden rests on student shoulders. The better students, faculty and staff sort their trash, the more waste management can compost or recycle. But with a community hailing from abroad and nearly every state, sorting trash Vermont-style can be quite complicated.

"People come from vast backgrounds," Smith said. "Every state has different procedures."

To increase awareness of proper trash etiquette, waste management put up instructive posters near recycling, trash and compost bins. They are also sending out "eco-reps," students trained in proper waste disposal procedure, to help educate their peers on campus. If students follow procedure, waste management could more easily transition to bagless recycling, a major goal for the team.

"It comes down to how conscious students are," Smith concluded. "And people tend to follow the path of least resistance."

PROFESSORS ADAPT TO AI IN THE CLASSROOM

By RACHELLE TALBERT & SAM LUEKE
News Editor & Contributing Writer

Across departments, Middlebury professors are grappling with the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education. Many professors, including Professor of English Megan Mayhew Bergman and Lecturer in Chinese Mairead Harris, have modified syllabi to permit AI in specific contexts.

"I want to make sure we're operating in reality, giving students what they need in this moment, and also pointing our writers and readers to a personal ethos that reflects the world they want to live in," Mayhew Berman wrote in an email to the campus. "I like to approach things in a non-sanctimonious way."

Bergman plans to host a creative writing chat to promote dialogue about AI usage. She also intends to host analog reading and writing hours.

Professor of English Timothy Billings has taken a similar approach, distinguishing between "augmentation" and "automation" in the kinds of work that generative AI might do for a student.

"Education specialists make a distinction between two fundamental uses for generative AI in coursework: 1) augmentation, i.e., uses that "augment" or enhance learning, such as providing explanations of difficult material; and 2) automation, i.e., uses that "automate" or substitute intellectual labor, such as the generation of written assignments or other material for submission. To put it simply, augmentation is allowed; automation is not," Billings explainswrote in his syllabus.

While many disciplines are only recently having to develop policies on AI software, language instructors have long reckoned with AI translation tools such as Google Translate. Harris says that, in some ways, the Chinese Department's AI policy has not changed significantly: at the beginning level, students should not use AI.

In 2023, however, the department reevaluated its policy for advanced students, who are now permitted to use generative technologies for limited purposes.

"Of all of the things that it does, I think it's pretty good at changing and parsing tone-of-voice. Is this word the vibe that I want? Does this word sound really formal? Does it sound like it's coming from a specific region?" Harris said.

Harris explained how students in her 300-level class work handwrite their initial brainstorming for essays in class. Then, they manually type their notes into a Word or Google document, ensuring that their professor can track changes they make. Once they have written their first draft, they are allowed to use AI tools, provided that they attach a log of their interaction with the tool when they submit the final draft.

"We also tell them that they can only ask at a specific sentence level. Say, does this sentence sound off? Is there anything unclear? Or, how can I make this sound more formal? ...but they can't take a whole paragraph and copy-paste it into ChatGPT and say, 'fix the problems,'" Harris said.

Still, Harris strongly emphasized the importance of generating one's own language, especially at the early stages of language-learning.

"What our goal is for beginning language, is we want students to develop their own Chinese voice in their brain," Harris said. "We want them to be thinking directly in Chinese... and we want that to arise in their own brain independently. [Generative AI] saves a lot of time, and the time that it saves is the whole process that is actually helping students build connections in their own brain that will get them to have an internal Chinese voice. They need time to be wrong."

The question on how to best allow students to build skills on their own, with or without the aid of AI, varies across departments. Professor of Biology Gregory Pask believes that STEM professors may be more concerned with imprecision in AI.

"I think the aspects of ingenuity, creativity — I think a lot of people in biology would agree that it spans all learning and all academic pursuits. I think a lot of people in STEM are looking at the inaccuracies and they might also be more in touch with the environmental impacts." Pask said in an interview with The Campus.

Pasks noted that when students interpret experiments using AI, the results can be unreliable, and that hearing from the scientists who conducted the experiments is crucial.

"In the end, there're not many things that are forcing you to use AI. I've heard this argument of how the toothpaste is out of the tube, but using generative AI is an opt in process, and I think more people maybe need to think about what they're losing, what they're opting out of, from a learning opportunity-side standpoint, when they're opting in to using it," Pask said.

Having a full ban policy of generative AI, Pask believes that the writing process is essential.

"It's designing an experiment, troubleshooting a bug, taking risks in your writing, this is where new synapses form, when the learning happens." Pask added in a later email.

COLLEGE BREAKS GROUND ON BATTELL PARK

COURTESTY OF TIM PARSONS

A sketch of how Battell Park will ideally look upon completion.

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like these in a more centrally-located area.

One student in this class, Mica Bodkins '26, took her involvement one step further, collaborating with Parsons to create plans for this park as her J-Term independent project.

Bodkins addressed the uncertainties regarding the construction on Battell Beach.

"It's hard for students to see their beloved Battell Beach getting ripped up, I think getting students to see what is actually going on is really important," she said.

The design process began with sight analysis and sketches to determine where there was concentrated student movement in the space, and where existing gas and power lines were running underground. The conceptual design phase came next, followed by collaboration between McCall and the Student Government Association (SGA) to create schematic designs for what students would actually like to see implemented.

"Middlebury has a lot of beautiful spaces ... but the idea of this area was that it would be student owned, a place that students have a responsibility for," Bodkins said.

> "Middlebury has a lot of beautiful spaces ... but the idea of this area was that it would be student owned, a place that students have a responsibility for."

Parsons noted the improvement of this area of campus overall.

"When you think of this in concert with the ... Battell museum, you see we are really starting to develop Battell beach," he said.

Battell Park will not only offer Middlebury students a space that they can feel ownership and responsibility over, but strives to make Battell beach, one of Middlebury's open outdoor spaces, more usable.

Phases two and three are contingent on approval from the Board of Trustees and additional funding from the Center for Health and Wellness, but current plans include the addition of more hammocks, a pavilion, hill seating in an amphitheater style, a fire pit and two sand volleyball courts down the hill from Pearsons Hall.

Parsons, Bodkins and McCall all expressed a desire for these subsequent phases to be increasingly student-led. The ability to continue this project relies on approval from the Board of Trustees and the ability to acquire more funding from the Center for Health and Wellness.

Understaffing continues to strain catering, dining, Student Activities Office

COLE CHAUDHARI/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The front office of the Student Activities Office, which is located in McCullough Student Center.

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director for student engagement, hopes that the vacant position in the SAO will not affect students all that much.

"We have asked student organization leaders to partner with us in the interim but are thinking creatively about how to combine financial transactions and purchase for multiple events or meetings at the same time where possible," she wrote in an email to The Campus.

The delay in response time from SAO has caused some stress for students. Katrina Schwartz '26 is the co-president of the Page One Literacy Project and reported delays in the budget allocation process.

"Our budget took a long time to come in and we had to reach out to inquire why it was so low. The SGAFC is in charge of our budget allocation, and according to the SAO, they made an error. We started the year with 200 dollars and they added 800 recently," she said in a message to The Campus.

Caroline Crawford, president of Staff Council, said that understaffing is a two-fold issue, in part caused by the cost of living in Vermont as well as a possible misalignment between the college's budget and the current level of staffing.

"Middlebury has done a really good job of raising salaries in these areas to try and improve recruitment. But, there's just a lot of jobs, not only on campus but around Vermont that are open, because there aren't people in Vermont applying. That's caused by just the demographic nature of the cost of living and what it means to live in Vermont right now," she said in an interview with The Campus.

Crawford said she understands that salaries and benefits for faculty and staff are the biggest cost at Middlebury, but believes that on-campus needs should be met by hiring for the necessary number of positions.

"Middlebury's reach is large. And we are waiting to see where Middlebury's reach could perhaps be reined in a little bit to align more with the current level of staffing," she said.

Editor's Note: Katrina Schwartz '26 is Senior Local Editor on The Campus.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF THE CHATEAU

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was open Monday through Friday for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

"I loved not having to leave the Chat all day in winter, being able to take literature classes in La Petite Bib, and then go downstairs to an excellent lunch prepared by Eleonore and Bob," Rentsch Moraga '76 wrote in a message shared with The Campus by Jolene Newton, the French Department academic coordinator. "I also liked being a waitress in several different languages. In those days, we all thought we were polyglots."

Again and again, alumni recalled the same small joy: shuffling downstairs in pajamas and robes to join the breakfast table, talking about the day ahead of them in a language other than English. According to Karen Nicholas Treanton '80, the dining hall was "the pull" to live in the Chateau. In the 1970s, residents had their own "beloved" live-in chef for the dining hall, according to event attendees.

Today's language students track their professor-mandated lunches at language tables in the upstairs of Proctor Dining Hall, but for past Chateau residents, it was simply part of daily life. Stacy Nordquist '80 recalls eating most meals in the hall's "homey atmosphere," featuring a professor who prided himself on being able to sit at almost any table.

"The nice thing was you got regular day to day vocabulary that you wouldn't pick up through your academic classes," Randy Dwyer '80 said. "At lunchtime, you could invite your professor and chat with them over lunch."

Once the dining hall closed for the day and the classrooms emptied, the Chateau came alive with social events put on by the residents. At Saturday's reunion, alumni swapped stories of surprise birthday parties and elaborate multi-course French dinners.

"That year [1977-78] we had a medieval costume party," Nordquist said. "I went as Joan of Arc. One of my friends and fellow Chateau residents wore my red bathrobe and went as the pope. His friend was visiting from Brown, and he made him dress as a hunchback!"

Quieter moments stuck out as well. Assistant Professor Emerita of French Mireille McWilliams recalled many nights spent gathered around the fireplace in the Grand Salon, chatting with a group of students in a mix of French and English.

"It was a sort of second family we had in the Chateau," one alumnus said.

The evolution of the Chateau in the second half of the twentieth century was a slow but unmistakable one. In 1972, the building's dorms were the first on campus to turn co-ed, housing men as well as women. Until 1979, a certain level of French proficiency had been required to live there.

"Even though there was no [Language Pledge] requirement, there was still an understanding that once you stepped through the doors, you spoke French," McWilliams said. "Kids were happy to speak French."

That year seemed to stand out in the memories of those affiliated with the Chateau as a turning point. Diminishing applications from French students led to the abolishment of the language requirement in the building, opening what had long been an exclusively Francophone community to non-French-speaking students.

In the 1980s, the language tables were moved out of the Chateau and the dining hall in the basement closed for good. After a period of dwindling French enrollment throughout the 1990s, the Maison Française was moved in the year 2000 to Franklin Street, where it remains today.

One-hundred years since its opening, the Chateau's classrooms are used by numerous departments and its housing is open to all upperclassmen. Professors noted the range of languages one might hear in a single pass through the building, but Assistant Professor of French Therese Banks maintained that even today, it is still a place where she was more likely to receive a "Bonjour" in the halls than a "Hello."

"Even if it's no longer an exclusively francophone space, the Chateau is an enduring symbol of Middlebury's role in foreign language," Associate Dean for the Arts Pieter Broucke told the crowd gathered for the centennial celebration.

COURTESY PHOTOS/ SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

In addition to housing the language tables, the Chateau was formerly a hub on campus for social events.

Concluding his speech at the panel, College Professor Emeritus Edward Knox listed a French bookstore and faculty lounge among other facilities that the building no longer hosts; in the same breath, he acknowledged the "highly deserved" improvements to faculty offices and increased housing and financial flexibility the college gained as positive changes.

"It's a bittersweet narrative, the life of an institution," Knox said.

Settlement of free speech lawsuit by FLORA eases state cannabis advertisement regulations

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business days, the retailer will gain automatic permission to run the ad.

Social media advertising gained considerable flexibility under the settlement. Posts still require pre-approval, but basic templates for ads can now be approved and then re-used for up to a year. Businesses are now allowed to include names of products in the posts, though still no photos. The CCB will require lists of businesses' social media handles to regularly monitor their feeds, as well as being looped in on any email and newsletter lists.

In-store signage is newly exempt from pre-approval requirements, and both in-person and online conversations between businesses and customers no longer count as ads.

"That level of government restriction was untenable, and I think the CCB understood that," Silberman said.

James Pepper, chair of the CCB, said that going forward, the board will be able to issue approvals or denials within the five-day time frame to ensure they are able to look over ads and provide feedback.

"I think some people may voluntarily want to go through pre-approval just to make sure that they're not inadvertently running an illegal advertisement," Pepper said. "I truly believe that pre-approval has saved a lot of unnecessary administrative activity in fines and administrative penalties."

The CCB most frequently finds issues with ads that make unproven claims about the medical advantages of cannabis or appear to be targeted at young audiences, Pepper said.

Following another requirement of the settlement, the CCB this week drafted a shortened version of the required health warning for cannabis radio and television ads. The current warning takes about 30 seconds to read, but the new draft takes under five. The Department of Health will review it and decide whether it is sufficient within the next 90 days.

"Sometimes, brevity is the way to actually drive home a point," Pepper said.

Silberman told The Campus that while the settlement makes meaningful progress for the industry, he is not satisfied with the outcome. The state's regulatory control over the cannabis industry is a serious violation of free speech, he said. He will continue to push to change the law in the Vermont Legislature in January, hoping to see all restrictions on advertising by cannabis retailers eliminated.

"I intend to remind [legislators] that when they violate the constitutional rights of one sector of society because they don't like that sector of society, that they are endangering the constitutional rights of everyone," Silberman said. "The whole point of the First Amendment is to protect speech that is disfavored by government."

Another glaring constitutional issue with the restrictions on cannabis retailers, Silberman said, is what the U.S. Supreme Court calls "speaker-based violation." While the Middlebury Natural Foods Co-Op has state permission to advertise their non-intoxicating CBD products in public, for example, FLŌRA cannot do so with those same products because it also sells cannabis.

"When the state restricts the right of an articulate type of person to advertise, that ought to worry everyone," Silberman said.

Pepper acknowledged that Vermont's cannabis advertising laws are especially restrictive compared to other states and industries.

"I think there are some lessons to be learned from how tobacco and alcohol advertising have been misused over the years," Pepper said. "The legislature is trying to correct that for cannabis, a newer industry."

MINI ILSLEY THRIVES AS RENOVATION OF MAIN SITE CONTINUES

By ROHINA MAHADIK
Contributing Writer

The historic Ilsley Public Library renovation project kicked off in March and is expected to be completed next fall, just in time to ring in the new school year.

While the main site remains closed, Middlebury residents can enjoy library facilities and programming at its temporary location on the first floor of the Duclos building on 30 Main Street, a space granted to them by the National Bank of Middlebury. This temporary space allows the library to remain easily accessible to residents, as it is in close proximity to public transport systems and local schools.

"We had known for a while that we would require space to keep library services going, and were preferably looking for a place downtown," current President of Ilsley's Board of Trustees Meg Baker said.

The space, dubbed 'Mini Ilsley,' houses much of the library's books and CD collections, while providing adequate room for work sessions and common spaces.

"The space is truly wonderful — very light filled and open," Director of the Ilsley Dana Hart said. "There is no real separation between age groups, nor is there a fully quiet space for silent reading ,which may not be the most ideal for a library, but is balanced out by the vibrancy of inter-generational mixing."

Joe McVeigh, the chair of the Ilsley 100 Project, shared that issues with the functionality of the children's section was a key factor in determining the need for the library's renovation. Previously, the children's room was housed in the basement of the Ilsley building, with very few windows and a growing mold problem.

"The best thing about the new space is that the children are right in front," McVeigh said. "There's a lot more activity and inter-mingling that was missing earlier and in the new design, the children's room is going to be the first thing you see when you enter the door."

McVeigh said that there were many new changes planned that patrons should look forward to. The renovated library will include new spaces for outdoor programming, such as a rooftop garden that could potentially be used for group meetings or yoga sessions.

The new design will also replace the former library entrance, which required individuals to climb steps. Additionally, three new entry and exit points will be added at convenient, accessible locations throughout the building. However, the original entrance will continue to exist as it has for over a hundred years.

COURTESY PHOTO / ERIC KILLORIN
Ilsley Library shares a space with the Bank of Middlebury during revonations.

"It was very important to the people of Middlebury that we not mess with that," McVeigh said.

Since March, a third of the work has been completed, with underground utilities in place and work on the interior steel structure ongoing. However, a recent challenge arose where the roof of the library needed to be replaced, requiring additional funding.

"We were really fortunate to get a $100,000 grant almost immediately upon announcing the need for a roof repair," Baker said.

Donations are still always welcome, and patrons can look for more information about how to contribute early in the new year.

In terms of community building and recreation, Mini Ilsley has endeavoured to continue its many programs, and students from the college have been able to continue work study at the new location.

The most drastic change in Ilsley's operations has been in the roles of its librarians.

"We are all working a hybrid schedule," Hart said. "Most of us divide our time working between the bank building, our own homes and the Little Seed coffee shop down the street."

Another new addition to their roles as librarians has been in overseeing the transfer and collection of books between Mini Ilsley, and a storage facility in Vergennes where collections that could not be shelved in the Duclos building are temporarily housed.

"We have librarians going up to Vergennes on a daily basis to page books. Community members can come in and request a book in person, which librarians then bring in," Baker said.

"Each morning we run a list of books that were requested, and we get about 25-50 requests a day," Hart said. "It's a system that's been working really well, we're fortunate for that."

Both the library and the bank currently share the same opening and closing times, primarily for logistical and security reasons. However, community members can expect a return to Ilsley's regular closing hours once the main site is functional again next year.

"While there is really no overlap in our workspaces, we do have the ability to utilize the bank's break room, with the bank's employees also participating in a bonus book club with us," Hart said.

While community members should anticipate many exciting additions to the main building, there remain numerous opportunities to connect with fellow patrons and community members at Mini Ilsley as renovations continue into the next year.

OTTER CREEK BAKERY HOSTS LOCAL BANDS FOR WEEKLY MUSIC NIGHTS

By DYLAN MCGINTY
Contributing Writer

Since August, Otter Creek Bakery on College Street has expanded beyond serving coffee, sandwiches and baked goods to hosting live music every Friday night. The sidewalk concerts have brought together students and residents in a family-friendly setting.

The bakery's stage is the sidewalk itself, allowing passersby to stop and listen or snap photos and videos from inside their cars. The series was originally planned for Otter Creek East in East Middlebury, but after the interior of that location was damaged by fire in August, the events were moved downtown.

On Sept. 27, Brandon-based band Bird Boombox performed. The group, formed three years ago by Josh Cummings, Garrett McMillan and Rob Fjeld, perform once a month at Otter Creek. Their performances often blend covers with their original, alternative genre work. According to Cummings, the Brandon music scene is flourishing with original artists and a variety of venues. Cummings said the band hopes for that energy to expand into the Middlebury area.

Bird Boombox likes to engage with the crowd. "I like throwing stuff out into the crowd and doing bits," Fjeld said. "Our original goal as a band was to play for large crowds, but we prefer playing for a crowd of five people who are totally into it."

The group praised the enthusiasm of the small Middlebury audience and said they look forward to returning.

Otter Creek Bakery has contributed to this energy since it was founded by Ben and Sarah Wood in 1986.

The business has won awards for their exceptional pastries. The Woods chose Middlebury as the ideal place to start their dream business, converting an old gas station on College Street into the bakery's current location in 1988.

Otter Creek's menu is influenced by the local network of businesses and suppliers, with fresh eggs, milk and vegetables being brought from Vermont farms.

Otter Creek organized the music series to connect artists from the area with town residents and college students alike. The future of the Middlebury music scene looks promising, with Otter Creek's shows reviving live music as a tradition in the town.

An employee at Otter Creek Bakery, Melinda Bachand, hopes that the Friday night music continues, but logistical challenges may arise as Middlebury enters the cold winter months.

"We want to keep the music going for as long as possible," Bachand said, noting Vermonters' resilience to cold temperatures.

The conversion of this local baked goods staple into a music venue has proven to be a success, with many locals stopping by to enjoy the ambiance under the setting Vermont sun. This unlikely location has hosted and will continue to host a wide variety of artists, enriching cultural offerings in town and bringing life and energy to the streets of Middlebury.

DYLAN MCGINTY / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS
Band Bird Boombox performes on the sidewalk in front of Otter Creek Bakery.

Backed by college, Ripton dam removed for environmental benefits

By LANGAN GARRETT
Staff Writer

In a culmination of a years-long effort and collaboration between the college and the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC), the Bread Loaf Dam on Brandy Brook in Ripton was completed on Aug. 27, restoring the stream and surrounding floodplain to its natural state.

An application to remove the dam was first submitted in 2021, according to Associate Laboratory Professor at Middlebury and College Lands Conservationist Marc Lapin and Science and Restoration Director at VNRC Karina Dailey. The century-old structure had accumulated excess sediment, suffered from poor maintenance and harmed wildlife while posing a flood risk to nearby areas. Its removal marked a major ecological restoration aimed at improving habitat health across the watershed.

The concrete dam, built by the college in 1937, is approximately 175 feet long and 25 feet high. Originally constructed to provide a drinking water supply to the Bread Loaf campus, it was later used as a snowmaking pond for the Rikert Nordic Center. Both purposes have since been replaced by more efficient systems, a well system for drinking water and an instream intake for snowmaking, rendering the dam obsolete, according to VRNC.

COURTESY PHOTO / KARINA DAILEY
The dam removal itself only took a couple of weeks after years of waiting for approval.

Lapin said the project involved numerous regulatory and organizational hurdles.

"Any sizable project must be reviewed under Act 250," Lapin said, referring to Vermont's land use and development law. "It made Vermont famous for being a green state. There are lots of layers in the application for permitting as well."

Passed in 1970, Act 250 ensures that large-scale development complements Vermont's landscape, economy and communities, according to the Vermont Land Use Review Board.

"Vermont conservation design [is] a statewide goal of connecting forest and riparian areas for wildlife corridors," Dailey said. "Reconnecting this river and taking the barrier out is providing movement for future migration of aquatic organisms and wildlife up and down that portion of the river."

Although administrative reviews delayed the project, the removal itself only took a few weeks. Engineers and Act 250 district commissioners ultimately approved the demolition of the historic structure. The focus now turns to replanting and stabilizing the site.

"The soil is reshaped, the stream is reshaped, and replanting the area in the fall is hard," Lapin said. "The winter flows will change what decisions we will make in the spring for replanting."

The site itself has already been seeded with a natural mix and mulched with straw preventing weeds from growing according to Lapin. She also noted that natural reseeding from spruce, birch and pine trees will also occur through seasonal foliage changes.

The college supported the removal by providing resources from Facilities and the Environmental Science Department. The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife also backed the project, citing benefits to native fish species such as Eastern brook trout.

The Vermont Dam Safety Division identified the dam as high-risk for flooding in the area, particularly to a critical road nearby. Restoring floodplain storage will help naturalize downstream movements of water and sediment, mitigating flood risks in the region. The removal will also improve water quality by increasing dissolved oxygen and reducing turbidity, according to Lapin and Dailey.

Dailey also emphasized the importance of local involvement in such restoration projects.

"The more people involved in the project, the stronger the project is," Dailey said. "We start at the grassroots level within the community and then we move forward with providing funding support, the science, technical expertise and collaboration. The Breadloaf dam removal was a really sweet example of community partnership and collaboration."

Editor's Note: Managing Editor Mandy Berghela '26 contributed in writing this article.

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SPECS Panther — Sexual pleasure is a human right: looking beyond scientific sexual models

Op-Ed

Christopher Symond & Mattea Fisher *are members of the class of 2028 and SPECS Peer Educators.*

SPECS Panther is a mascot for SPECS (sex positive education for college students) and serves the Middlebury community. As a part of Health & Wellness Education, SPECS Panther seeks to educate and spark independent dialogue, not be the end-all be-all resource on campus. We encourage Midd Kids to break down the walls of silence by engaging in sex-positive conversation — wherever, with whomever and about whatever is most comfortable, easy, and safe for you. Our editions will be educational!

Early scientific models that describe how the body functions and responds to different sensations during sex, such as Masters and Johnson's sexual response cycle and Helen Singer Kaplan's triphasic model, viewed sex as a linear, sequential experience that began with excitement and desire and culminated in orgasm. These models deserve some credit, as they established language and theory about how the body reacts during different elements of a sexual experience. They, however, also set narrow expectations for what sex looks like and, by extension, who is considered "sexually functional." In reality, these models excluded the experiences of many people with physical, emotional and cognitive functional differences. At SPECS, we believe it is necessary to reanalyze these models through an inclusive lens.

Human sexuality is more complex than body-focused models may make it seem; it also encompasses context, emotion, stress, communication and countless other variables. According to the Dual Control Model of Sexual Response, developed by former Kinsey Institute director Dr. John Bancroft and Dr. Erick Janssen in the late 1990s, the brain searches for sexually relevant stimuli during a sexual experience. Positive stimuli, such as the comfort of a partner's bed, words of affirmation and open communication, can accelerate sexual arousal. On the other hand, negative stimuli, such as stress, unwanted pain or a lack of trust can apply brakes to arousal and, therefore, decrease pleasure.

Arousal and pleasure are fluid experiences that depend on the situation and inform human sexual functioning. What may feel comforting and arousing one day or within one context may feel dysphoric and uncomfortable another day or within a different context. Thinking about arousal as a shifting emotion is especially crucial when considering the various ways different bodies interact with sex.

Within society, normative ideas about how sex "should look" can conflict with the experiences and desires of individuals. Sex is different for everyone, and expecting bodies to perform according to specific models of arousal limits our perceptions of "sex". Such expectations limit arousal and pleasure for those who either do not or cannot experience aspects of sex, like orgasm. Orgasm can be enjoyable, but is not the focal point of sexual experience for everyone. Many people may find it difficult to reach orgasm, or they simply may not want to. As such, it's important to care for all aspects of the sexual encounter.

An aspect of pleasure that is often forgotten is erogenous zones, which are places on the body that are particularly sensitive to touch and can induce sexual or nonsexual arousal. Erogenous zones are not limited to genitals. Common examples include the ears, the stomach, the nape of the neck and the back of the knee, or any body part that an individual enjoys touching or having touched. It is completely normal to experience pleasure from non-genital physical stimulation.

In navigating discussions of individual relationships with sex, it's important to remember that language is deeply personal. Everyone has a different way of describing their identity, body parts, and likes and dislikes, and it can be helpful to talk about the experience itself rather than rely on labels of sex, gender and ability. For example, the benefits of barrier methods (such as external condoms, internal condoms and dental dams) extend beyond STI and pregnancy prevention — they can also be helpful if the feeling of bodily fluids is overwhelming for anyone who experiences sensory overload. Some other sensory-focused tools that might enhance pleasure are loud music, impact toys like paddles or feathers, wax play, blindfolds and/or flavored drinks. Communication is key in establishing what feels comfortable for both partners to maximize enjoyment.

Communication styles vary, which means that consent can look different for everyone. So, what does consent look like when we might not communicate in the same way? In SPECS, we frequently use the Planned Parenthood FRIES model (freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, and specific) to define consent. Although this model is an important framework, it also has some gray areas; what is considered enthusiastic, for example, may vary by individual. With that in mind, we encourage the use of tools, such as yes/no/maybe questionnaires, to set boundaries with your partner, as well as having conversations about how both partners communicate in and outside the bedroom. This could look like establishing a public hand signal that tells one partner that the other is feeling aroused, or allowing time for one partner to collect and write down their thoughts during a discussion — whatever seems like it could feel supportive to one or both partners is worth a try.

Informed by early ideas about sex as a predictable, normative experience that climaxes in orgasm, we often limit access to pleasure for those who do not want to or cannot experience sex in such a constrictive way. Everyone differs in preference and ability, and sex is a highly individual and personal process. At SPECS, we believe it's important to embrace the spectrum of these various experiences.

MIDDLEBURY DOES NOT PROTECT FREE SPEECH

Op-Ed

Ryan Ulen *is a member of the class of 2026.*

COURTESY OF RAMYN HANG

The CIA hold information sessions for language school students during the summer

President Ian Baucom entered his tenure with multiple public statements asserting "the freedom of our students to express and explore thoughts outside orthodoxy, inside and outside the classroom, without fear or hesitation." And yet, the reality of students on our campus dictates otherwise. With the Trump administration's threats to the autonomy of academic institutions, Middlebury is capitulating by intimidating and silencing its students. Free speech at Middlebury is in crisis and this administration is faltering in its commitments to open expression.

Violet Gordon and I are two seniors from the class of 2026. Like many of our peers, we joined the Middlebury community because we are concerned about the world's greatest issues and are committed to engaging with difficult questions. This summer, because we shared information about the CIA's involvement in global destabilization and violence, the college threatened us with disciplinary action.

On July 16, in response to a CIA information session held at Middlebury Language Schools, we shared educational pamphlets outside Axinn Center. We were respectful and followed policies; we did not block entrances or coerce people to take our pamphlets. Without cause or introduction, Vice President of Public Safety Demitria Kirby, wearing civilian clothing and a mask, demanded our names and IDs. She asked questions about the nature of our pamphleting, and whether they were registered with the office of Events Management. Because we were compliant, Officer Kirby allowed us to continue.

Two weeks later, the Dean of Students, Joe Russell, sent us respective emails, informing us of 'very concerning potential policy violations of two community guidelines' — Demonstration and Protest Regulations and Respect for the Authority of Middlebury Officials. Essentially, we were found in violation of the student handbook for distributing pamphlets without prior registration and for not immediately presenting our IDs to an unidentified officer.

For over six weeks, I had multiple meetings with Dean Russell regarding 'potential policy violations.' Despite framing these policy violations as only potential issues, Dean Russell asserted at my first meeting that I had two options: I could admit fault through a Dean's Disposition (an official document issued by the Dean of Students outlining my violation and disciplinary action) or face a drawn-out judiciary board process. Terms such as "educational sanction" and "permanent record" were used. I was warned that disputing any part of Officer Kirby's report would automatically send my case to the judiciary board. In other words, it was already determined that I was in violation of a policy.

With the support of multiple faculty and students, my charges were dropped one by one. Meetings with Dean Russell were spent asking about the specific policies I violated and receiving indirect answers. On my behalf, faculty and students pressured President Baucom and administrators to commit to free speech by clarifying their policies and dropping both my case and Violet's.

Violet was given an apology for a disciplinary action process that, "should have never happened." These cases were built on a sham charge that the administration perpetrated: That handing out pamphlets constitutes a protest, and therefore must be registered.

What began as a confrontational act of intimidation was shut down, but only through hours of preparation, meetings with faculty and proper strategy. Any other student without these advantages would have had to accept responsibility. This is not acceptable behavior from an institution that claims to be a beacon of free speech.

Many students at Middlebury have shared unregistered information through a poster, a flyer or a social media post. And yet, few students have experienced these methods of intimidation. Most students would also not give their name to a masked individual without that individual introducing themselves first. Violet and I were targeted with arbitrary charges because we shared information that the government deems controversial and threatening.

The college's inconsistent and incoherent execution of protest policy raises an alarm. We are drifting toward institutionalized authoritarianism in a direct strike against the ethos of our college, submitting and surrendering to the values of the Trump administration. Sharing information is the most basic foundation of our institution. As students, we constantly share information in our classes through clubs, organizations and online platforms. While our Open Expression policy commits to these fundamental rights, our college administrators do not. Student disciplinary codes are not aligned with Open Expression.

Now, our college's response to the Trump administration's threats to higher education include creating an academic environment where this sharing of information is a reserved, registered privilege and not a guarantee. If this is our college's basic response to two students pamphleting, what does this say about their potential reactions to further dissent?

We do not believe that protesting the CIA's record of overthrowing democratically elected governments constitutes an unorthodox opinion. But even if it did, President Baucom has affirmed our right to express it. In this especially volatile national political moment, Middlebury must be committed to protecting free speech. If our administration cannot provide clear and sufficient justification for the disciplinary actions it pursued against us, then it fails to uphold the very principles it claims to safeguard. Free speech is not a preference, nor an aspirational goal. Rather, it is a binding obligation, one we must insist our administration honor with integrity and vigilance in moments such as this one.

The college has an opportunity to protect free speech by clarifying its policies around protest and aligning the student handbook with the Open Expression policy. Pamphleting is not a protest, and masked employees should not ask for identification without introducing themselves. To learn more about Violet's and my demands, read our petition for a policy clarification and change at go/freedomofspeech/.

SAMPLING ERROR: YOU

Op-Ed

***Camiel Schroeder** is a member of the class of 2026.5.*

Two weeks ago, I made the case for specifying the global problems you wish to spend years on, the capacities you intend to compound, and for treating everything else as means. Today I want to place these choices at the right altitude, because from arm's length everything blurs and from ten years out it usually becomes embarrassingly clear. Set aside the buzz lines, and your career adds up to about 40-50 years, roughly 80,000 working hours. That is the single largest block of time you will ever control. The thesis is simple. Life is smaller than it feels, and if you do not decide what those hours are for, inertia will determine it for you.

Let's run the tape from the top.

You start with about 13 years of school, which translates to roughly 2,340 days of fluorescent-lit desk-sitting and forgetting everything except how to fold a paper fortune teller. Along the way, you move houses a few times, and by your second or third move, the vast majority of your time with your parents is already behind you.

By college, you've consumed a nontrivial fraction of the 1.5 million pounds of food you'll manage in a lifetime, enough to noticeably fill a gym. You'll stream nearly a decade of TV, and turn nearly half a million gallons of clean water into lukewarm shower runoff. A magnificent return on investment you are, if you squint.

In your twenties and thirties, the pace accelerates. You will likely cycle through roughly a dozen jobs (look at you go!), before you hobble into retirement. If you're particularly average, you will have five romantic partners before marriage, or before abandoning the institution altogether. If you do marry, you will likely have 1.6 children, which is rather awkward. You will celebrate about eighty birthdays, attend a scattering of weddings, some funerals for people your age, and many more funerals for people older than you. If you are lucky, you will have a circle of friends that persists for a few decades. If you are unlucky, you will outlive most of them.

Zoom out some more. About 150,000 people die every single day. That's two football stadiums cleared out before the next sunrise. Meanwhile, 385,000 babies arrive daily: half a million timelines kick off every morning, each destined to compete with you in traffic. By the time you reach the end of this article, a small city's worth of humans will have both popped into existence and checked out of it. "Must have been the wind", goes the universe.

Let's go bigger still. Since the first biped decided walking upright was a good idea, roughly 117 billion people have lived and died. Line them shoulder to shoulder and the chain would loop Earth almost three thousand times. Each one correctly assumes their life is an indispensable data point in the grand ledger of existence. The ledger, conveniently, remains at large.

Widen the scale again. Our Milky Way galaxy contains about 200 billion stars. Count them at one per second and you will still be ticking them off six thousand years from now. The Milky Way, lest you start worrying, is one in an estimated two trillion.

Had enough yet? Somewhere out there lurks J0529-4351, a quasar so excessive it outshines 500 trillion suns. At its center sits a black hole weighing 17 billion solar masses, swallowing the equivalent of a star the size of our sun every single day. J0529-4351 will blaze for eons while our languages, nations, and any marks of civilization, vanish.

Suppose we are alone in the cosmos. Then the burden and the privilege are ours. Ours is the only species capable of rewriting genomes even as we rehearse pre-Copernican errors. Without us, the universe might just be rocks smashing together and gas setting itself on fire. With us, it might briefly mean something. The probability that matter and energy ever conspired to produce consciousness is vanishingly small (If we truly are the only lifeform in the galaxy, NASA has ballparked it at 1 in 10^{22}, ie one in tens of billions). We may not get another shot at this strange experiment of awareness, which places upon us the obligation to see it through.

The future is not a handful of generations; it is a timescale on which trillions of lives may yet unfold if civilization holds. Imagine artificial intelligence deployed not to deskill us but to tackle what we once mistook for fixtures of reality: the arrest of aging, cures for every major disease, food and energy so abundant that scarcity recedes into a footnote. Imagine orbital habitats, living worlds patiently terraformed, Dyson structures sipping starlight, and archives of understanding that persist for millennia. That future is contingent. It depends on choices made in the narrow present, including, unfortunately, yours.

What looms ahead is not a seminar puzzle but an existential crucible that demands immediacy. A "limited" nuclear exchange between the United States and Russia could trigger a global famine that starves billions as agriculture collapses. Severe pandemics are not rare events in waiting; plausible estimates put a COVID-scale outbreak at a few percent per year. In 2023, more than half of surveyed AI researchers judged there to be at least a one-in-ten chance that advanced AI leads to human extinction or comparably catastrophic outcomes. Who's feeling lucky?

You have about 80,000 working hours in your life. Those hours can either dissolve into routine or be aimed directly at the problems that matter most. 80,000 hours, a nonprofit based at Oxford, exists to help you do just that. Their career guide walks you through big career decisions step by step, from clarifying your values to weighing your options. Their global problem profiles explain, in plain English, the risks that could shape the entire future, from AI safety to biosecurity to climate stability. They run a job board that lists hundreds of vetted, high-impact roles you can apply to right now, ranging from research fellowships on AI governance to biosecurity labs looking for sharp scientists. They even offer one-on-one advising calls with trained coaches who can help you think through your decisions.

The question is not whether you will be remembered. You almost certainly will not. The question is whether, in the finite span allotted to you, you directed your hours toward ends greater than yourself.

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YOUR FIRST YEAR SEMINAR SHOULD BE FUN

Op-Ed

***Violet Gordon** is a memer of the class of 2026.5.*

I've had many moments at Middlebury over the last few years where I marvel at what I've been able to learn here. Taking classes that are actually functional — invigorating, even — has been a fairly novel delight in my academic career, coming from a high school which is consistently on the list of failing public schools in our state. Needless to say, I did not exactly have great preparation for Midd classes, and I definitely did not do enough to remedy this before college. During my first weeks here, I could barely speak in class. The thought of writing anything at the college level made my stomach churn. What changed all of this for me, giving me a voice in discussions and an eagerness to write, was my first year seminar, "The Journey Within."

In high school, the most advanced writing class offered was AP English, which I took over Zoom my junior year. I unsurprisingly slept through most of it. The following year, plagued with intense senioritis, I signed up for the easiest English class our school offered: creative writing. By the time I graduated, I could write really bad essays, and really bad poetry. That was about it.

When I got to Middlebury, I relied heavily on my peers and my older sister who, two years my senior at Midd, had taken many of the same classes as me and kindly shared her writing with me (just for guidance, I promise!). I was convinced, from the start of my first semester in the spring of 2023, that I would never feel comfortable here as a college-level writer. Now, three years later, I've been a peer writing tutor for our college's writing center for two years. A huge part of my writing skills and confidence as a student were born during my first year seminar.

As I think back to the courses that were most impactful to me as a student at Middlebury, I immediately recall this first one. We read Salinger, Plato, Marcus Aurelius, and seminal texts like "Siddartha" and "The Dhammapada." But beyond the books we covered, our professor thoughtfully fostered an environment where we, as unsure and inexperienced college students, could enjoy 75 minutes twice a week in meditative conversation. We reflected on the literature of course, but also, just on the newness of everything we were experiencing that spring. We all met with our class's peer writing tutor at least once, and we were encouraged to meet with each other, too, to talk about our writing or even just our thoughts on what we were learning. By the end of the semester, I had some new lifelong friends, a treasured mentor, and some papers, poetry and creative nonfiction I was very proud of.

What made this seminar so fruitful, I believe, was its emphasis on learning through doing — we were encouraged to write about what we found exciting about our readings, and we were encouraged to do so in whatever form we were drawn to. Yes, we had to write the classic textual analysis essays too, but the structure of our final assignment was largely up to us. By having so many chances to explore the boundaries of our own writing and creative abilities, I gained an invaluably robust repertoire of compositional skills.

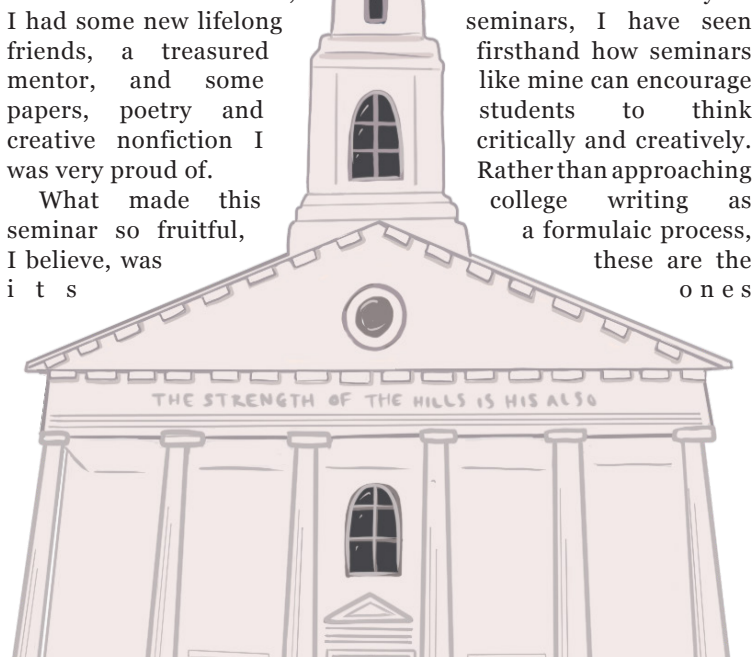
Our hands weren't necessarily held in this course; rather, we were encouraged to pursue and perfect whatever literary genre we liked without fearing intense consequences. As first-semester college students, the impact of a class where we felt entirely safe to take risks with our writing and push the boundaries of what we had learned from high school was the single-most important skill I gained.

As a course-embedded tutor to various first year seminars, I have seen firsthand how seminars like mine can encourage students to think critically and creatively. Rather than approaching college writing as a formulaic process, these are the ones that produce not only better writers, but more importantly, confident, inquisitive college students.

In seminars I've worked with that tend to approach college writing as a box-ticking, high-stakes process, I often hear students telling me that they are primarily concerned about getting a good grade on their next writing assignment rather than actually developing their writing skills. More concerning than that, I get more and more kids from these courses that come to me, as first-semester college students, saying that they hope to never take a writing class at Middlebury again after this.

The number one goal, I believe, of our first year seminar program in terms of college writing preparation should be to keep students engaged and mindful about their writing process, and excited to write. As a student myself who has reaped the benefits of a seminar that did exactly this, and as a tutor who has witnessed the effects of courses that foster comfortable, creative writing environments, I urge faculty to consider these factors when honing their curriculum for their first year seminars.

And for the students in first year seminars now, I'm thinking of you all, and hoping you are finding ways to enjoy writing when you can this fall. You have the next four years to stress over papers. This is the time to have fun with writing, lean into your imagination, and make "mistakes". And a reminder, or perhaps more so a request, to all powers that be at Middlebury: The first year seminar should be fun!



ELIZA BERNENE / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

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The Middlebury Campus

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: TO MAINTAIN FREE SPEECH, PROTECT UNPOPULAR IDEAS

Op-Ed

Joseph Jacobson *is a member of the class of 2027.*

This letter to the editor from the Middlebury College Republicans is a response to the Editorial Board's (E.B.) piece titled "To Maintain Free Speech, Start Listening," published in the Sept. 18 issue of The Campus. I am leading the writing of this letter with the consultation of club members, including Dylan Carroll and Erin Faith Fuller, among others. In their piece, the E.B. has characterized their position as being supportive of free speech. However, a close read of their argument reveals that they paradoxically take a position leaning in favor of censorship and intolerance rather than any legitimate form of free speech.

We as the members of the Middlebury College Republicans have decided to respond with this letter outlining the flaws in the E.B.'s understanding of free speech. With advocacy for freedom of expression and intellectual rigor on campus being the first priority for our club, it would be unfortunate for the arguments presented by The Campus E.B. to remain unchallenged as the authority on free speech on campus.

There are several claims made in the E.B.'s article that we will address. First, they write that "unlike co-existing in the general public, living on a college campus entitles you to a sense of security." College is not a safe space. Going to college is designed to expand and challenge your understanding of the world, not to reaffirm your preexisting beliefs, as the E.B. seems to insinuate. The E.B. already understands this: They operate as an assembly due to differing beliefs. Society works the same way. If one person had a monopoly on the truth, dialogue would not be necessary. If the purpose of higher education was to disseminate the ultimate truth, we would be at a seminary, not a liberal arts college. Real safety is freedom from physical harm, not from disagreeable ideas. Equating the two creates a close-minded environment that disserves the students by implying they are unable to handle opposing viewpoints. We strongly believe that students should be emboldened to explore all viewpoints, not only for their own enlightenment, but also for the community's intellectual benefit.

The E.B. then claims that "inviting 'controversial' speakers to speak on moderated panels does not foster political conversation, but instead creates a top-down system, where students are made to listen to views with no chance to engage with said speakers." There are four main issues with this claim.

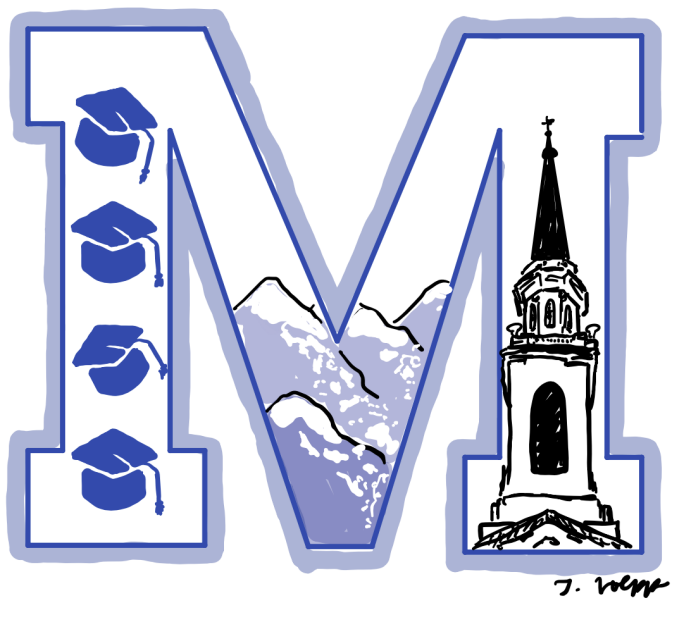
First, we spend most of our time at school in a top-down system of education — the classroom. Should we not go to lectures anymore, if it is a deficient way of learning? The E.B. must recognize the porous nature of this argument; after all, they encourage students to "start listening," which is exactly what speakers and lecturers need in order for their ideas to be heard. Further, if speakers are inherently unfair, why did the E.B. not object to other speakers that have come to campus, instead of referencing just one?

Second, and closely related, the E.B. has unintentionally revealed their bias by only referencing the transgender healthcare talk, while disregarding many of the left-of-center individuals that regularly speak on campus. Who gets to decide which speaker is "controversial"? We believe all speakers, regardless of how "controversial" they are, should be invited and encouraged to speak at Middlebury.

Third, the E.B. was concerned that they were not able to sufficiently engage with the two speakers at the talk about transgender healthcare. However, we had several members from our club meet with Leor Sapir and Brianna Wu from the discussion before and after the event along with other students — some even had dinner with them. Choosing not to engage is different than not being allowed to.

Lastly, the E.B. writes, "We also affirm that our campus should commit to freedom of speech, while actively limiting hate speech."At first glance, this sounds reasonable — of course, no one wants to encourage hostility. But if we leave "hate speech" undefined and ambiguous, anyone can define anything as hate speech when someone says something they don't agree with. Who gets to decide what is and isn't hate speech? What one person finds hateful, another may see as a valid expression of belief or critique. If the line between free expression and hate speech is blurred, it becomes dangerously easy for institutions — or even just the loudest voices on campus — to silence ideas they find disagreeable under the guise of "protection." That is not protecting freedom of speech; it is curtailing it. The principle of free speech cannot be sustained if its limits are drawn according to shifting or subjective definitions. Otherwise, we risk eroding the very freedoms we claim to uphold.

Middlebury ranks 249th out of 257 in FIRE's 2025 free speech rankings, earning an "F." This reflects a campus climate where many feel unsafe voicing their opinions. Together, we have a responsibility to change that. Tolerating and hearing all perspectives doesn't divide us — it makes our campus more inclusive and strengthens us. Shielding ourselves from discomfort may feel protective in the moment, but it leaves us unprepared. The people inhabiting the world outside our secluded campus are not 90% left-of-center; in fact, they represent a much larger array of beliefs and opinions. The true promise of Middlebury is not only graduating with an elite education, but also being prepared to thrive in a diverse and challenging world.



BRICK BY BRICK, WE CARE ABOUT HOW CAMPUS LOOKS

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

As the Chateau celebrates its 100-year anniversary and the first group of Middlebury students take up residence in New Battell, we are reflecting on the meaning of the buildings where we study, work and live. Buildings are part of what make our campus feel distinctly "Middlebury." Recent and upcoming construction projects have the potential to significantly alter the character of our spaces, and we want to emphasize that student input and experiences should be at the forefront of administrator's minds as they think through these changes.

Part of how special campus feels to us is because of us, the very students who live and study in it: We infuse the buildings we inhabit with character and life, and our relationships to those buildings grow with time and experience. Some of us who were freshmen living in Old Battell can attest to how it tends to grow on you after you spend a formative first year there. The way that our campus looks and feels reflects who we are as an institution, how we present ourselves to prospective students and alumni, and influences how we experience the college as a place of higher learning.

One editorial board member who interacted with alumni celebrating the Chateau's anniversary remarked on the strong connection that alums expressed to the building itself and to its unique features such as the dining hall that was once in its basement. Not every department at Middlebury would have attracted so many alumni to an independent event decades after their graduation, but the Chateau is special, not just because of its architectural beauty, but also because of its link to the French-speaking community at Middlebury and more broadly to Middlebury's identity as a foreign language powerhouse. Strong connections to campus buildings improve the current student experience and foster longstanding relationships with alumni, who are then more likely to stay involved with and donate to the college in the future. We believe that maintaining these relationships requires preserving the character and identity of our buildings and thus our institution — none of us wants to come back in 20 years and no longer recognize our surroundings.

We understand the value of new buildings: They demonstrate that Middlebury is embracing the future and caring for its students. However, growth as an institution does not only mean embarking on shiny construction projects, but also putting care and energy into improving what we already have. This does not have to come at the expense of innovation and progress: A good example of successful fusion between tradition and modernization that we commend is the Axinn Center and the Starr Library, which feels simultaneously modern and rooted in our history as a small liberal arts institution, winning a Sustainable Design Award from the Boston Society of Architects, and an Excellence in Architecture award from the Society for College and University Planning.

More than flashy buildings that look good on an admissions brochure, we appreciate attention to smaller renovation and maintenance projects, from adjustments for safety regulations and fire hazard concerns to sustainable building practices. No building is for any one student, and determining how our campus should be constructed must be the result of a holistic decision-making process. We ask that the administration involve student input in this process. We are the most invested not only in how our campus looks, but in the ease of access and functionality in everyday life — we are for accessibility and safe, functional facilities, not for more new buildings that will add to someone's legacy or make an admissions pamphlet more appealing.

We are also mindful that as much as the built environment is meaningful to us as Middlebury students, we are not its only stakeholders. The faculty and the town will be affected by the architecture of the campus for much longer than the four years each student spends here, and their input should matter equally, if not more.

On that note, we want to state unequivocally that we are not in favor of the plans administrators have hinted at for a new student center that would combine all three of our beloved dining halls into one massive building where Proctor now stands. While we know this idea stems from understaffing concerns, we feel the large size such a building would destroy several aspects of the small, residential campus that we love and disrupt the college's "skyline" for town residents — even the construction of BiHall was a stretch in that regard. The necessity of walking around campus, running into friends and absorbing its beauty is what we like about Middlebury; we do not want so many of our needs to be contained into one towering structure.

At a time in which Middlebury is thinking carefully about its identity after the decision to close the Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS) at Monterey, we call for the administration to focus on financial choices which will improve the quality of life and student experience. Although it's a great marketing tool for prospective students, a new dorm is not the only way to be forward-thinking about our campus' appearance. Prioritizing investment in our existing structures can help ensure that students on campus today will want to return decades from now, just like the alumni who returned to celebrate the Chateau.

GARDEN-FRESH GRAZING: "KNOLCI" RETURNS

By MADELEINE KAPTEIN
Editor in Chief

When someone places a shot glass filled with beet soup in front of you, you take a sip. When you remember the beets were grown less than a mile away, you take another.

Last Friday's "Knolci" dinner marked the second time in two years that Dolci, Middlebury's student-run pop up restaurant, hosted a three-hour, four-course meal prepared with ingredients from the Knoll, the college's organic farm. The Knolci in October 2023 was challenged by summer floods, and this fall's harvest was limited after severe drought. Regardless, Knoll interns and Dolci chefs curated an impressive evening of "grazing" on local food for lucky lottery winners and their plus-one companions, totaling in approximately 94 hungry students.

Guests entered Atwater Dining Hall to find it transformed from a spot for lunch between classes to an eatery fit for fairies. Two bouquets of fresh Knoll flowers waited at our table beside a pitcher of mysterious pink liquid. The beverage tasted like a melted popsicle, but classier. My tablemates and I turned to our menu cards for answers: It was a shisho and lime seltzer, a drink made with syrup from shisho leaves.

Our first snack of the evening was the aforementioned chilled beet soup "shooter" made with coconut cream. We clinked our tiny plastic glasses together, saying "cheers" to what would likely be the most nutritious, deepest magenta "amuse-bouche" of our lives.

"We were trying to figure out ideas of what to do with the beets, because it was one of the main things [the Knoll] could give us," Dolci President Numi Moreno Calderon '26 said.

She had thought about serving bowls of soup, but said the shooters were an easy solution to expedite service without stuffing guests full too early. Knowing the quantity of what came later, I was grateful for the pacing.

Charcuterie boards for the whole table to share were unveiled next: Camembrie, La Luna and Riley's cheese from Blue Ledge Farm, grapes, and pear slices cornered the arrangement. Crackers made with herbs from the Knoll surrounded a pot of Champlain Valley Creamery's smoked queso. Globs of whipped honey butter were dispersed throughout and a dish of deep magenta beet hummus was placed to the side (beets were clearly in no kind of shortage).

"You have to think of the balance," Moreno Calderon said. "You need a cracker and a dip, and you have a lot of cheese, so then you need something sweet to balance it out and to add some freshness."

While the queso took center stage on the board, most of my table's portion remained by the end of the course. For me, the sweet and smooth honey butter was the star of the show.

Then came the salad: Knoll-grown kale leaves, honeycrisp apple chunks, sweet potatoes, watermelon radish, goat cheese, dried cranberries and pumpkin seeds with a dijon maple dressing thrown together in one big bowl. Family style, we passed it around the table and scooped our own ideal proportions of crunchy, flavorful ingredients.

The main course, a Korean-style bibimbap dish of cucumbers, carrots, Knoll-grown spinach, shiitake mushrooms and egg over a bed of rice, was served with sides of miso kimchi and gochujang sauce from Pitchfork Farm. The entrée, while delicious, felt out of place for what had until then felt like a light, spice-free garden party. Knoll intern and Dolci board member Kayden Lemee '26 explained that cooking Asian cuisine is a common result of working with the Knoll because they grow a lot of Asian style vegetables, like the Korean shisho leaves that went into the pink drink.

For dessert, servers brought out a rosemary elderberry shortbread tart paired with rosemary honey ice cream. Dolci chefs made both themselves, infusing the sweet treats with the herb. The ice cream, which had to be made pint by pint, took almost 12 hours in total.

"After making the cream base, we toasted a decent amount of rosemary and steeped that into the ice cream for 10 to 15 minutes on low heat," Lemee said. For the pastry, the team finely chopped the rosemary and added it directly into the dough.

The dish was darned with rosemary leaves and a fresh Knoll flower on top. While the tart's rosemary flavor was overpowering, the ice cream's flavoring was perfect and its texture creamy.

Knolci is a rare opportunity for students to understand the hard work their peers and Associate Director of the Knoll Megan Brakley put into growing produce, Lemee and Moreno Calderon said. While a small part of its harvest contributes to dining hall meals, most is donated to local nonprofits like Helping Overcome Poverty's Effects (HOPE) or the Open Door Clinic in Middlebury.

"People go to the Knoll and everything, but there's not enough opportunities for people to enjoy the program that's down there," Moreno Calderon said. "I think being here in Vermont, it's really important to highlight the agricultural scene."

The next time you're stargazing, eating pizza or playing cards at the Knoll, remember that you could be only paces away from a young crop growing into what will someday be enjoyed in the form of a luscious beet, carrot or spinach shot.

JUNE SU/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Top: The "grazing board" included herb crackers, a variety of locally-sourced cheeses, grapes and pear slices.
Middle: Beet soup "shooters" were served in tiny plastic shot glasses.
Bottom: The main course was a Korean-style bibimbap dish with sides of miso kimchi and gochujang sauce for guests to add at their leisure.

VOICES FROM THE SILENCE: THE OTHER MOZART

By YO YO ZHANG
Arts & Culture Editor

A vast white gown spilled across the stage of Wright Memorial Theater this past Friday, introducing audiences to the forgotten prodigy of the Mozart family with"The Other Mozart." The play, written and performed by Sylvia Milo and directed by Isaac Byrne, features a striking 18-foot dress by Magdalena Dabrowska and an evocative soundscape by Nathan Davis and Phyllis Chen. It is a one-woman show reclaiming the life of Maria Anna (Nannerl) Mozart, Wolfgang's gifted elder sister.

An off-Broadway success at HERE Arts Center in New York and London's St. James Theatre, the production continues to tour nationally and abroad. As the program detailed, it has been staged in Austria by the Mozarteum Foundation inside Mozart's own apartment and in Vienna at the Mozarthaus on Domgasse — venues steeped in the composer's history.

The play unfolds as an extended conversation between Nannerl and the audience. It is composed of only one scene, one character and one set: a monumental dress.

Within the circumference of the dress, Nannerl (Sylvia Milo) recounts to us her story ever since her first encounter with the harpsichord: her love and talent for music, the end of her musical career due to her adulthood, her unfortunate late marriage, and her intertwined fate with her little brother Wolfgang Mozart. The abrupt end to her music career began her life-long melancholy, where she could no longer perform in the public and had to rely on Wolfgang's potential career success in Vienna.

"She could not lose her reputation by being paid to play. God forbid it," Sylvia Milo said at a theater department lunch before the show on Friday. "It would be prostitution for women to be paid by playing music."

The play keeps its focus squarely on Nannerl: she is both the only character and the sole storyteller. Milo recalled how that choice evolved.

"At first I wanted it to be Mother and Nannerl, but then I really wanted her to talk directly to the audience — without the fourth wall, without going back in time — to have her come here and speak," Milo said.

Performing the role herself, Milo felt an almost urgent need to deliver Nannerl's voice.

"I realized she really wants to talk. I had so many words that needed to come out. It was an incredible experience. It seems Nannerl was like this too — she just needed to say it all," Milo said.

This urgency drove Milo's research; She worked with different primary sources and letters, trying to piece together a full picture of Nannerl's life. However, this process proved challenging due to the scarcity of sources documenting Nannerl.

"I could barely find any words about her in Wolfgang's biography," Milo said.

In the production, much of the script is lifted from the Mozarts' family letters — yet strikingly, few of the women's letters survived. Even worse, although Nannerl has composed several pieces of music herself, none of these manuscripts endured.

"Our job was to write original music into this silence," sound designer Nathan Davis said. "The composer's own work was lost."

A lot of efforts were made to create Nannerl's musical world. Davis and Chen built a soundscape meant to spark Nannerl's imagination without imitating it.

"We want to be sure we won't compose anything that would be mistaken for Nannerl's music," Davis said. "Instead, we use instruments like music boxes — we know the Mozart family had one — along with clock chimes, bells, teacups and hand fans, all objects that might have captured her imagination as a young musician. Sylvia tries to write music of potential, imagination and wonder — to start the conversation."

The set itself carries symbolic weight. The 18-foot dress serves as young Nannerl's playground in the first half of the show, where she leaps and twirls like a ballerina within the vast hemline; after her marriage, she becomes confined inside it, transforming the gown from a stage into a cage.

"It was her world," Milo said about her design behind the prop. "It has to cover the stage, to take space, and be 'the dress' — which is the beautiful thing and also the restraining thing. At the time, the fashion was so marvelous, grand, and luxurious, but it was so restrictive for women."

For many in the audience, "The Other Mozart" is their first encounter with Nannerl. We saw her curiosity, her dreams, her disparity and resilience.

"I think it's pretty authentic, especially in the way it reveals Nannerl's negative emotions instead of portraying her as a perfect protagonist or a victim," Yuzhuo Wang '28 said. "We can see her strong obsession with music, praise and fame — all are natural human desires that we could emphasize."

In this transcendence of time, Wang was deeply touched by the relationship between Milo and Nannerl.

"A female artist of today steps into the silence of another from centuries past — and in that space between time, the story unfolds in tension, introspection, and empathy," Wang contemplated, "I'm left with so many questions for Sylvia: How does she understand her relationship with Nannerl? At what point does she become Nannerl, and when does she feel as though she's in conversation with her?"

As the music and lights faded, Nannerl stepped back, her 18-foot dress trailing behind her as if carrying the suffering, prejudice and restrictions of her time. Her genius and compositions may remain a mystery, but her story is finally told. The audiences will remember Nannerl — the other Mozart.

COURTESY PHOTO/CHARLOTTE DOBRE

"The Other Mozart" tells the often forgotten story of Wolfgang Amadeus' sister, Nannerl.

FORGOTTEN, BUT FOUND AGAIN: PANCHIKO AT HIGHER GROUND

By NORAH KHAN
News Editor

Fate works in mysterious ways.

The sound of British band Panchiko was lost for years until it fell into the hands of the internet, simply by chance.

In 2016, an individual had discovered their first collection of demos titled "D>E>A>T>H>M>E>T>A>L" while sifting through a section of forgotten CDs in a charity shop in Nottingham, England. The cover featured artwork taken from a panel of a Japanese manga series. The few liner notes listed only the band members' first names, creating a shroud of mystery.

The person, an anonymous user on the platform 4chan, uploaded the disc-rot riddled album to the internet, and listeners became both enamoured with the music and entranced by the mystery of the whole situation. The album slowly developed a cult following, with people searching for any information about the band across all corners of the internet.

Panchiko was an enigma.

At the risk of sounding like your Spotify daylist, "D>E>A>T>H>M>E>T>A>L" can be characterized as a medley of electronic-tinged indie rock with layers of shoegaze in between sci-fi samples and desperate vocals. Its soundscape is reminiscent of melodies from the late 1990s and early 2000s, evoking feelings of nostalgia.

Considering the era in which the album was released, a period defined by electronic-rock fusions that would eventually take over mainstream music, the band was certainly ahead of its time.

At the time of the band's conception in 1997, childhood friends Owain Davies, Andy Wright, Shaun Ferreday and John Schofield initially performed in bars despite being underage.

The group was inspired by the expanding Britpop scene and bands like Nirvana, Blur, Super Furry Animals, New Order and Suede.

They self-recorded and produced the demos that eventually would make up "D>E>A>T>H>M>E>T>A>L" between 1999 and 2000.

From these demos, the band burned approximately 30 CD's, distributed among friends, with a few sent to reviewers and labels, but to no avail. The group ultimately disbanded, leaving behind their teenage dreams of making music. The members went on to pursue other non-musical opportunities as the memory of the band faded away.

Eventually, the internet's best detectives were able to track down Davies, messaging him on Facebook. Baffled that they suddenly had fans yearning for their bygone band, Davies reconnected with his old bandmates and began uploading more of their older demos to Bandcamp.

The momentum built up and eventually the band reformed in 2021, 20 years after their dissolution. The dream they had given up on was suddenly a reality, one they welcomed with open arms.

NORAH KHAN / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Panchiko performed at Higher Ground on Sept. 26

On Sept. 26, my friends and I drove up to the concert venue Higher Ground in Burlington, excited at the prospect of witnessing a band live after a solely online existence of close to 16 years. Watching from within the mass of people shoved into the venue, I was overcome with pure admiration for Panchiko; these were people who truly deserved their flowers. They had given up on a dream they thought was never possible for them, and now here they were, playing for a crowd buzzing with anticipation and elation.

For any other band, this show would be business as usual, but for Panchiko this was so much more. I could feel the appreciation and connection between the audience and the band as Davies sang, backlit in swirling blue and green lights. When the song "D>E>A>T>H>M>E>T>A>L" played, I stood basking in the glory of how incredible it was to witness this moment. I could feel the tears prickling my eyes as I was overcome by the beauty of it all.

My friend Myrah Valmyr '27 described the transformative experience of watching the show. "I felt like I was the first person to listen to music, ever. For an artist to be able to captivate that feeling, put it in a box and give it to all their listeners, is incredible," she said.

Their newest album, "Ginko," released in May of 2025. It's a formidable follow-up to their legacy of music. Compared to their post "D>E>A>T>H>M>E>T>A>L" releases, which didn't quite sustain the same level of alluring charm, "Ginko" feels like Panchiko back to their best.

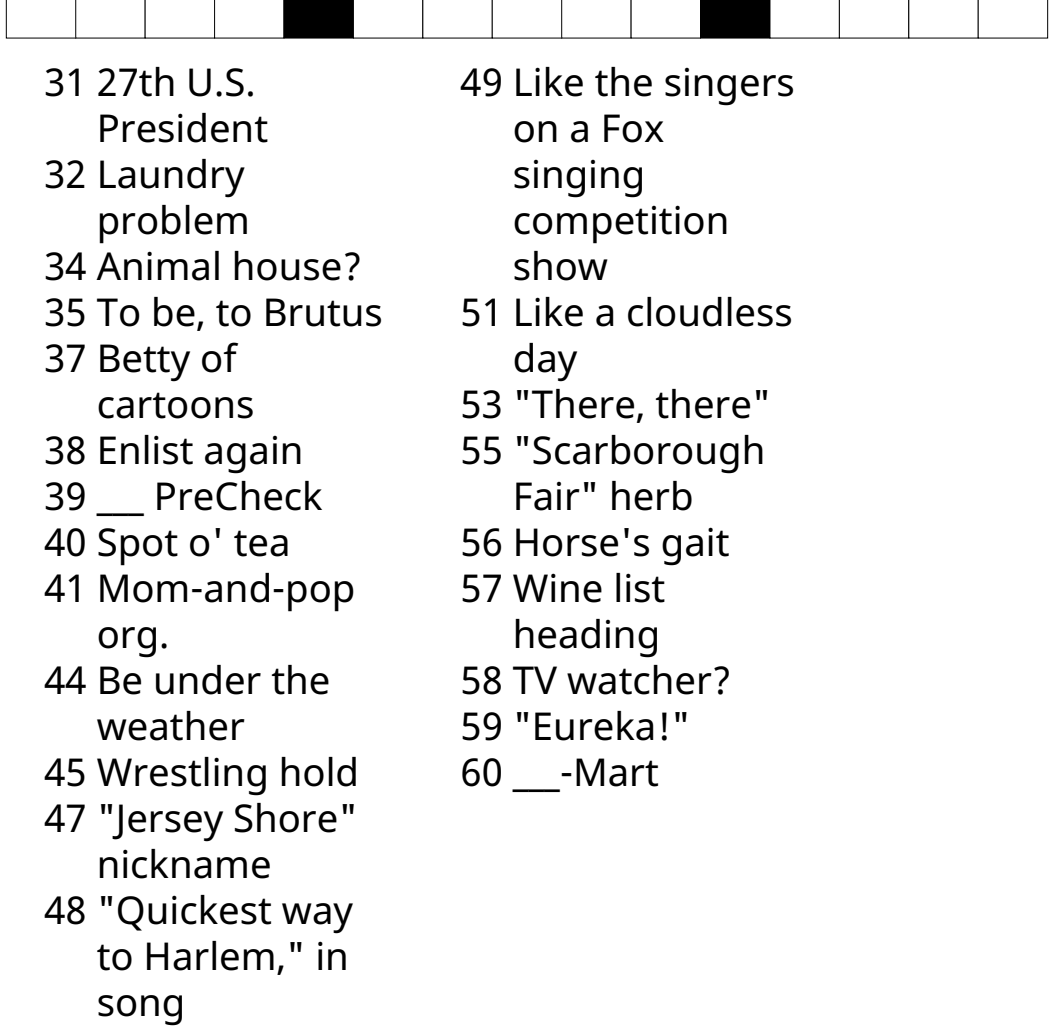
The album boasts similarities to Radiohead's 2007 album "In Rainbows" (one of my favorites) in the way that it weaves rock and electronic textures into lush, atmospheric sounds. "Ginko" thrives on contrasts, shifting from quiet passages into blossoms of glitchy electronics and punctuated rhythms that carry the listener along on a 39-minute journey.

Panchiko is an act that has lived longer online than it has in person. Nevertheless, the band sounds like they've never spent a moment apart, with all their components meshing together perfectly.

As the crowd filtered out, I marveled at the band's ability to continue creating music and maintaining an atmosphere that hails back to their beginnings.

Good Morning!

Ella Charnizon



ACROSS

1 "Toodles!"
5 Gag reflexes?
10 First in a morning trio
14 Aid and ___
15 Candy heart words
16 Blood: prefix
17 Waste allowance
18 Were friendly with each other
19 On
20 "Gr-r-reat!" cereal icon
23 Indian yogurt drink
24 Houston N.B.A. team
28 Dreyer's partner in ice cream
29 Morsels
33 One involved in a memorable "bubble"
34 Hook, for one
36 Weaponry
37 1985 John Hughes movie, or what 20a, 10a and 13d, and 43a and 47a would be if they got together
41 Frost, e.g.
42 Sneezer's need
43 Froot Loops mascot
46 Tide type
47 With 43a
50 Puts on, as makeup
52 Ship of 1492
54 Children's literature artists
58 Gush (over)
61 Part of a drum kit
62 Good, long bath
63 Spiced tea
64 "I swear!" slangily
65 Dust Bowl migrant
66 H.S. math course
67 Russian refusals
68 Warmhearted

DOWN

1 Spill the beans
2 Middlebury C.V. Starr Schools _____
3 Itty-bitty
4 Justice Dept. staffers
5 ___ and mighty
6 Sunburn soother
7 Jabba the ___ of "Star Wars"
8 To have, in Paris
9 Ra, in ancient Egypt
10 2004 Will Smith animated film
11 Take home
12 "Te ___" (Spanish for "I love you")
13 Third in a morning trio
21 Bone in the leg
22 Green prefix
25 Neutral shade
26 Dead center?
27 Texting format, for short
30 Rub the wrong way
31 27th U.S. President
32 Laundry problem
34 Animal house?
35 To be, to Brutus
37 Betty of cartoons
38 Enlist again
39 ___ PreCheck
40 Spot o' tea
41 Mom-and-pop org.
44 Be under the weather
45 Wrestling hold
47 "Jersey Shore" nickname
48 "Quickest way to Harlem," in song
49 Like the singers on a Fox singing competition show
51 Like a cloudless day
53 "There, there"
55 "Scarborough Fair" herb
56 Horse's gait
57 Wine list heading
58 TV watcher?
59 "Eureka!"
60 ___-Mart

SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH ALEX STAVROPOULOS '29, MEN'S BASKETBALL

By VICTOR KORTE
Contributing Writer

Alex Gklaros-Stavropoulos '29 is a first year center on the men's basketball team, towering at 6'11. Originally from Los Altos, California, he plans to pursue a Physics major. He played for Saint Francis High School, where he was a captain his senior year. He hopes to help the team reach the NCAA tournament again.

Victor Korte: Coming in as a freshman, what's been the biggest surprise about college basketball compared to what you imagined?

Alex Stavropoulos: The biggest surprise for me was the physicality of play through all five positions. In high school, you can get away with a lot more with regard to late switches or missed box outs, but from what I've experienced so far, you have to be super intentional and move early. It's not just bigs, either — you need to watch out for a box out from a guard just as much as a center if you want to rebound effectively.

VK: Which players — college, pro, or otherwise — do you study or model your game after, and why?

AS: I study and model my game after Hakeem Olajuwon and Domantas Sabonis. Hakeem had arguably the greatest low post footwork of all time. He was super creative as well. What I really like about his film is that he makes the defender play at his pace, not the other way around. He never looks rushed or off-balance, and he constantly keeps his opponent guessing without forcing anything ill-advised. There's a level of patience and control in his game that I try to bring into mine, especially when I'm working in the post or trying to create in tight spaces. Additionally, he has great intuition on where to be in order to block a shot or force a miss. Sabonis brings a different kind of impact in playmaking ability as a big. He's a high-IQ player who can facilitate from the elbows, run dribble handoffs and keep the offense flowing with quick reads and good decisions. He's also relentless on the glass, finding ways to generate extra possessions. What I appreciate most is how involved he is in every part of the game. He doesn't need to dominate the ball to make a difference, he just makes smart plays, competes, and plays to win. That versatility and toughness is something I really try to bring to my own game.

COURTESY PHOTO / ALEX STAVROPOULOS

Alex Stavropoulos '29, a first year center on the men's basketball team.

VK: Do you have any personal routines or superstitions before stepping on the court?

AS: I always visualize and set goals for myself for each practice, game or workout, as I feel it helps me prepare myself to succeed. I try to stay away from superstition because I know it doesn't have any real impact on the things I can control, like effort, energy or how I respond when things don't go my way.

VK: Do you think about basketball as a possible career, or more as a vehicle for growth, discipline, and opportunities while you're here?

AS: For me, it would be a dream to be able to play professionally, even if just for a few years. I definitely plan to take advantage of the opportunities off the court afforded to me by playing, and I think it is a great way to grow as a person by learning discipline and work ethic. Ultimately, I play basketball because I love the game — and the things that come with it are nice to have.

VK: Outside of basketball, what's been the most unexpected part of being at Middlebury so far?

AS: Something that has been unexpected is the overall openness of the people here to meeting new people and having new experiences, which I really like. I'm a pretty open-minded guy, and I like to surround myself with people who are the same way in that regard, so it has been a real positive surprise. I had a general idea of what it would be like, but seeing it in real life is different.

VK: What's something about you that most people wouldn't expect, especially given your role as a varsity athlete?

AS: Something that people wouldn't expect about me is that I love learning and reading about science, specifically physics. I really enjoy knowing why things happen and their underlying structure, and physics satisfies that itch for me.

VK: Do you feel extra pressure to perform because of your size and visibility, even when you're just walking around campus?

AS: It can sometimes feel like I am always visible walking around campus, but I see that as a blessing rather than a burden. I would be lying if I said I didn't like being recognizable most times. It isn't always my favorite, especially when I am just focused on doing a specific thing and not on how I come across. However, for me, a cool thing about going to a small school is knowing a larger percentage of your class and being known more widely. There are a few times where I would like to be able to blend in more, but you can't have it both ways. At the end of the day, I would take being visible over not being so.

VK: Best pregame song?

AS: MY favorite pregame song is "Digital Dash" by Future.

Editor's Note: This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

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THE SIDE HUSTLE: COLLEGE CLIMBING WALL GETS A MAKEOVER

By TING CUI
Sports Editor

THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS / TING CUI

Students test out new routes on Middlebury's rebuilt climbing wall in Nelson, which opened at the start of fall semester with brand new holds.

Middlebury's climbing community returned this fall to find a brand-new wall towering over the indoor tennis courts in Nelson Recreation Center, complete with shiny holds, flat panels and fresh, cushy mats. The first thing wall veterans noticed was what was missing: the cave. The steep and storied overhang where experienced climbers congregated, setting routes that defied gravity, is gone. In its place is a flat, pristine surface that looks more like a commercial gym than the charming, textured wall that preceded it.

"The old wall had a lot of character," said Alex Laakman '27.5, a wall monitor and experienced climber. "At first, you're like, man, this wall sucks. And then over the next year you kind of learn to enjoy it, even though it was objectively a really bad wall to climb on."

After 10–15 years of service, the old wall met its demise out of necessity. Its bolt holes had stripped, making it impossible to safely secure holds. Half the time, monitors couldn't attach holds at all, and when they could, the bumpy surface meant holds had to sit perfectly flush or risk being unsafe.

Installed over the summer with funding from an anonymous donor, this new wall replaced the rapidly deteriorating structure. Setter Matthias Galban '27 began putting up the first routes right when classes started: top rope and lead climbs on the higher section, plus beginner boulders scattered across the flat expanse.

The technical upgrades are significant. Gone is the textured surface where climbers could smear shoes or snag tiny cracks. In its place is a "blank canvas," as former head wall monitor Maya Henning '25 described it, that is dramatically easier to set routes on. The wall comes with an arsenal of new holds — bigger pinches, longer rails, ball-shaped jugs — that offer a variety that was formerly impossible. Most exciting are the volumes, table-sized structures that can be bolted to the wall to add dimension.

"We can be way more creative because everything can now be secured flush," Henning said. "You can do literally whatever you want."

The renovation also came with new mats and a reorganized space, with shoes and cubbies relocated to the corner by the stairs. There's more room, more seating, more of everything — except, perhaps, that ineffable quality the old wall possessed.

"I miss the features in the old wall," Orion Heiser '28 said. "This one's a little blank, which I think limits creativity. The old wall had a more homey vibe. The new wall feels a lot more corporate." After a pause, he added, "But it's much more accessible, I think, for everyone."

The loss of the cave has been particularly noticeable. Advanced climbers took it up as a serious challenge, but for newcomers, it could have felt like an intimidating, exclusive space. Without it, the wall is flatter and more open.

That tension — nostalgia for the scuffed old wall versus excitement for the clean slate — came up time and again in conversations with climbers. However, the change may be helping to draw new faces. Open hours this semester have been busy so far, with many first years trying climbing for the first time, and the climbing club's GroupMe ballooning in size after the Activities Fair. There are even talks of starting a competitive climbing team, which would be a first for Middlebury.

First-timers approaching the climbing wall might expect to hear power screams echoing off the walls or see shirtless climbers aggressively brushing holds before attempting moves, with hand fans at the ready to dry their chalked fingers between attempts. They might anticipate someone screaming "SEND IT!" from across the gym, or groups discussing "beta" and "projects" and "crimps" with scholarly intensity as various flavors of Celsius cans accumulate on the mats. And of course, chalk — a climber's best friend — along with the infamous "chalk goblins."

Only a few of those stereotypical boxes are actually checked. For the uninitiated, the space can still feel intimidating. But don't be fooled.

"The goal of the wall is that it's a comfortable place for anyone to come and try something new," Laakman said. "So many people come to Middlebury never having climbed before, try it a few times, and just get hooked."

The jargon is easy to learn. "Routes" are specific climbing paths. At Middlebury's wall, they are color-coded and labeled by difficulty, with tape marking each problem's starting holds and path up the wall. Monitors set new routes about every month. "Projecting" means you're working on a specific climb. "Beta" is advice on how to do it, though "spraying beta" is unsolicited advice, and, like mansplaining, is frowned upon. "Send" means you've completed it, and a "crimp" is a tiny fingertip hold.

What makes Middlebury's wall culture unique is the ethos behind it. Climbing is a social sport where people spend as much time sprawled on mats chatting as they do on the wall. It's easy to make friends when everyone shares the same strange obsession with grabbing plastic rocks.

"Wall culture is honestly the best," Henning said. "We have so many people who know what they're doing and so many beginners. People are supportive and cheer for you whether you're climbing a V0 or a V8."

The wall is open six days a week, except Saturdays, with designated beginner hours, BIPOC hours and women and non-binary hours alongside general open hours. Nine paid student monitors help newcomers learn the ropes — sometimes literally, since the wall also offers top rope and lead climbing clinics in addition to bouldering.

Henning said her favorite moments come from beginners surprising themselves.

"When someone doesn't think they can do it, but they try and try again, and finally get that first climb. They're so excited — that moment of 'oh my gosh, I can do it.' It's cool to see people work out the puzzle of climbing, thinking through and figuring out what will make them successful."

The climbing wall is more than just a place to climb. It's a community hub where beginners dare to try something new, professors climb alongside students and friends keep each other company. Whether you're a first year or a seasoned veteran, there is always a place for you at the wall.

The once-cherished cave may be gone, but its character will return. This time, built not from texture and quirks but from the community that gathers there, chalking up and reaching for plastic rocks with the same determination that previous Middlebury climbers brought to that old, beloved wall.

THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS / TING CUI

The old wall pictured above before its replacement this summer, featuring a textured surface and distinctive cave at the end.

WOMEN'S TENNIS HOSTS ITA REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

By SIMON SCHMIEDER
Senior Sports Editor

The Middlebury women's tennis team hosted the ITA New England Regional Championships this past weekend, bringing three days of tennis, 19 teams, and over 100 players to campus. The tournament saw Elsie Van Wieren '28 and Gusty Beveridge '28 reach the quarterfinals of the A singles bracket, while Ren Barton '29 won the B singles bracket.

The ITA Regional tournament was Middlebury's second and final home competition of the semester. The winners of the tournament's A singles bracket and doubles bracket each earn spots and advance to the ITA Cup in Rome, GA with a chance at All-American honors. Overall though, the stakes were modest at this past weekend's tournament in comparison to the spring season's major competitions.

The fall is a period of experimentation, and the Panthers used their home tournament to play as much as possible and create a foundation to build on for spring.

"Our real season is in the spring," Anna Lardner '26 said, "So [the tournament] is pretty much a showcase to tell us what we need to work on and what our strengths, what our weaknesses are."

The structure of the ITA Regional tournament enables a flexible approach: Coaches can enter their entire roster for any type of match, allowing players to get plenty of singles and doubles reps — a freedom nonexistent in most spring competitions. Middlebury's new courts also made hosting the tournament possible, accommodating all of the players and teams over the three day competition.

"You play singles, you play doubles, or you play singles and doubles, or you don't play at all," Lardner said.

The unique tournament structure also means players are always out on the courts. During the day you could find a match taking place at any one of Middlebury's three courts, from Proctor to Nelson to the new courts. Some athletes played up to four matches in one day, making for a marathon of tennis by Sunday.

Unlike a marathon, however, the players do not compete with pacing in mind. Every match is an all-out effort, from Friday morning to Sunday afternoon.

"We are always just very focused on that one match, one point. You don't think about the next, because then you're not focused on [the current match]," Charlotte McCann '26 said.

Lulu Wu '26 added: "You have to give it your all every single point. Every point matters."

This focused, fighting mentality reflects the hyper-competitive nature of tennis. You are always directly facing your opponent, and once the game has begun, there is no hiding or letting up. Feet away, the crowd watches on, including future opposing players eager to learn your weaknesses, opposing fans trying to get in your head, and the intense tennis moms fiercely observing it all — a truly high-strung environment.

Despite the external pressure, the Panthers emphasized sticking to their game and maintaining physical, mental and emotional intensity throughout the weekend.

"You go out there and compete how you wanna compete," McCann said.

Even off the courts, Middlebury's athletes were still on the clock. Players typically wait an hour between matches, but "waiting" is a misnomer. It is crucial for members of the women's tennis team not only to refuel and stretch after a game, but also to cheer on their teammates when playing.

COURTESY PHOTO / DAVID ZHAO

Lulu Wu '26 in action for Middlebury.

"We are a team that puts a big emphasis on if you're not playing, you're watching very intently," Lardner said.

"Everyone plays a huge role, whether that's on the court or off the court," Wu said.

Moving on from the tournament, the Panthers can be content with an overall positive weekend and a better idea of where improvement is needed for the spring season.

The Middlebury women's tennis fall season comes to a close in two weeks at Bowdoin, a reminder of how quick the campaign passes. For now though, the Panthers will prioritize recovery after three days of intense play.

"I'm in shambles right now. You must be in shambles?" Lardner asked McCann after her final match on Sunday.

"I'm tired," McCann said.

Such exhaustion is well-earned given the way the Panthers served, volleyed and cheered for three straight days during the ITA Regional Championships.